

FEATURE

Celebrities' book on marriage inspires

By Joseph R. Thomas
Catholic News Service

Both the practicing Catholic and the observant Jew, I suspect, are likely to come away from a reading of *From This Day Forward* (William Morrow, \$24) with a great deal of respect for Cokie and Steve Roberts and the success they've made of their interfaith marriage.

They might also come away with a sense of frustration. And while the Roberts' story is inspiring - and the co-authorship adroitly handled - the frustration would be understandable.

Early on, even before the ceremony at which a priest and a rabbi officiated at the home of Cokie's parents, there was a decision that each would reinforce the religious values of the other and the children born of their union would be raised in both traditions. In a marriage that has lasted 33 years, they've done a commendable job of it, but believers are left with too many questions about the how of it.

From the authors' point of view, however, this is the story of a total marriage which happens to be interfaith; it is not a how-to manual on every aspect of the interfaith relationship.

For instance, we are not told what the children (there are two, a girl and a boy, Rebecca and Lee) were taught about religion, how they were taught or who taught them. We do know they were christened but only because Cokie makes reference to having received christening gowns from others "at the appropriate time," although we are not told when that was, who performed the ceremony or how it was celebrated.

On the other hand, we are told how Cokie immersed herself in Judaic studies and how she introduced the Seder meal



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and other observances into the family, although Steve apparently was then what would be called a secular Jew from a secular Jewish family and admits that today he is a better Jew because of Cokie.

Cokie, of course, is the noted television news personality, having blossomed in that field after making career sacrifices on behalf of her husband and family. Steve, a former White House correspondent for *The New York Times* and senior political writer for a news magazine, is now a university professor and occasional political commentator. Together they write a widely syndicated weekly column.

Both are gifted people and have collaborated on a variety of ventures over the years of their happy, sometimes bumpy, marriage. A couple of years ago Cokie authored the best-selling *We Are Our Mothers'*

Daughters. Both their children are married, Rebecca having wed at home in a ritual similar to her mother's with a priest-relative officiating, and Lee having married into a Protestant family, with a priest and minister-witnessing the vows.

Cokie, the daughter of Rep. Hale Boggs, at one time the House Democratic whip, and Lindy Boggs, current U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, was raised as an observant Catholic and obviously still is, the book making reference to attendance at Sunday Mass with the children and her attachment to the church.

She comes across as a determined, graceful, resourceful, likable woman of great common sense, uncommon sensitivity and traditional values. Steve seems more like a work in progress, deeply in love, constantly developing, a nice guy with a strong sense of familial loyalty and responsibility.

Their book is nicely paced. There are seven chapters, four of them dealing in conversational style with their own courtship, wedding, and their marital and parental lives. The others deal with marriage as lived by other American couples: Colonial and pioneer families, slaves, immigrants and contemporary partners whose unions ended in divorce.

There is much wisdom and humor in *From This Day Forward* and it stands as an inspiring testament to commitment, marriage and traditional values, whether viewed from an interfaith perspective or not.

The fact that some details are absent doesn't detract from what is in essence a welcome, wholesome, well-told story of marital love and its accompanying tensions and satisfactions, joys and sorrows, and its inevitable compromises. It can be read and enjoyed by anyone for its own sake but cries out to be given to newlyweds or those engaged to be married.

For another take on interfaith marriage and a variety of other subjects, Mary Gordon's *Seeing Through Places* (Scribner) is appealing. The author of serious but popular fiction, she was raised as a Catholic by an Irish-Catholic mother and Jewish father and she reminisces about the influence of things Catholic on her life, an influence that is obvious in much of her writing.

The story of a different kind of family is told by Dave Eggers in *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (Simon & Schuster) in which he recalls how, starting at the age of 21, he raised his younger brother, then 8, after the deaths of their parents.

Thomas, retired editor in chief of *The Christophers* and a former diocesan newspaper editor, is a frequent reviewer of books.

Priest comedy is hit-and-miss

NEW YORK (CNS) - Following are recent capsule reviews issued by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'Keeping the Faith'

Problematic yet witty comedy about two dynamic young men of faith, one a rabbi (Ben Stiller) and the other a Catholic priest (Edward Norton) whose friendship is threatened when their childhood friend (Jenna Elfman) returns to New York, and both fall for her. Director Norton's portrayal of a conflicted priest is occasionally off-putting, but his doubts are dealt with earnestly and without undermining his priestly commitment. Questioning of priestly vows, the rabbi's affair, fleeting crass language and an instance of profanity.

The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-IV - adults, with reservations. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 - parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Joe Gould's Secret

Fact-based retelling of the relationship between *New Yorker* magazine writer Joseph Mitchell (Stanley Tucci) and homeless eccentric Joe Gould (Ian Holm), who survived on handouts in the 1940s while scribbling an oral history of the Big Apple. Also directed by Tucci, the period piece looks swell but its skimpy story sags when the secret at hand becomes obvious. Brief full nudity, some rough language and occasional profanity. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III - adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R - restricted.

Me, Myself, I

Tedious Australian comedy-drama about an unhappy reporter (Rachel Griffiths) in her 30s who suddenly finds herself living in a parallel universe married to her old flame with three children and a dog. Director Philippa Karmel's *Twilight Zone*-like film has good acting but the plot becomes tiresome and slapstick seems thrown in for effect. Sexual encounters with brief nudity, attempted suicide and some rough language. The USCC classification is A-IV - adults, with reservations. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R - restricted.



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